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U.S. Tried to Bug Soviets Here in '79

Finding of Devices in New Complex Led to Added Scrutiny, Protest

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The United States tried in 1979 to implant eavesdropping devices in apartment buildings at the new Soviet Embassy complex here, forcing the Soviet Union to take extraordinary measures to protect its new embassy chancery from electronic surveillance, according to John Carl Warnecke Sr., who helped design the \$65 million complex.

Discovery of "bugs" in the walls of residences within their complex off Wisconsin Avenue led the Soviets to disassemble parts of the new chancery building, minutely inspect other parts and X-ray "each inch of steel the night before it was put up," Warnecke said.

"For three months after the consulate building was finished," Warnecke said in a nine-page account of the affair that he prepared for The Washington Post, "the Soviets moved scaffolding over the entire skin of the building with X-ray equipment looking for 'bugs.'"

They also refused to accept materials fabricated outside the building site, including all precast concrete, he said.

The incident, which provoked an official Soviet protest, suggests that both sides have used similar highly sophisticated espionage techniques to try to penetrate each other's embassies for years in the unending superpower "spy war."

The new U.S. ambassador in Moscow, Jack F. Matlock Jr., has filed a formal protest in Moscow accusing the Soviet Union of "a breach of the norms of diplomatic conduct" by infiltrating the U.S. embassy in Moscow with bugging devices and intelligence agents. Reiterating that protest in Washington, State Department spokesman Charles E. Redman said the Soviets had violated a Vienna convention signed by both governments that assures the inviolability of diplomatic installations.

The Reagan administration is now weighing what other action to take over Soviet subversion of the

U.S. Marine Guard in Moscow and infiltration of the current embassy there. It is also trying to determine whether the still-unfinished new embassy chancery, which has been found riddled with eavesdropping devices, is salvageable or should be rebuilt.

Two members of Congress who looked at problems with the new embassy in Moscow this week concluded that "the earliest possible date of occupancy is at least five years away, if ever."

A decision to rebuild from the ground up, which some in Congress are now advocating, would add considerably to the already extremely high cost of the whole embassy complex caused by delays, overruns and extra security expenditures. So far, Congress has appropriated \$190 million for the project.

Construction of the chancery building was halted in August 1985 when the United States locked out Soviet construction workers in the wake of the first discoveries of eavesdropping devices.

When the Soviets discovered the bugs in the newly completed apartment buildings of the Mount Alto complex, they made a big public issue out of it. The Soviet charge d'affaires at the time, Vladilen Vasev, "waved around" pictures of the eavesdropping devices when he went to the State Department in January 1980 to lodge an official protest. The pictures were later released to the press here.

The Soviet government newspaper Izvestia charged that "the amazing acoustics" provided by the devices would have allowed the FBI and CIA to hear "every sound, from a word spoken in the drawing room to a whisper in the bedroom."

Now the shoe appears to be on the American foot.

Administration critics charge that the United States made a fundamental mistake in allowing a Soviet state firm to build the new U.S. Embassy complex in Moscow and in not insisting Americans oversee the

prefabrication of various materials off the construction site there.

Yet, under reciprocity agreements laboriously negotiated by Washington and Moscow between 1969 and 1972, the Soviets similarly had to allow an American company, George Hyman Construction Co., to build their new Mount Alto embassy complex.

The discovery of bugs implanted by U.S. agents in the new Soviet apartment buildings enabled Soviet authorities, however, to take the extraordinary steps they did to prevent the same thing from happening at their new chancery.

Warnecke in his report said the Soviets assigned 10 to 12 inspectors to examine "every piece of material" that went into the building, causing delays and considerable extra cost in the construction.

"Apparently, for the Soviets, this was worth the extra expenses involved," said Warnecke, who served as associate architect for the Soviet Embassy project.

According to Warnecke, the Soviets also took these steps to assure the security of their new embassy:

- They paid an extra \$180,000 to have windows and window frames taken apart, inspected and reassembled on the site.

- The marble facing had to be of a solid two-inch thickness without any three-quarter-inch sheeting on the back "because the Soviets did not want a layer of epoxy glue between the marble that could hide a bug."

- They paid an extra \$40,000 to \$50,000 to bring in structural steel in separate phases so that every inch could be X-rayed "the night before it was put up the next day."

- All caulking of joints was inspected, and before any concrete was poured, the steel structure was examined to be sure there were no hidden bugs. One large concrete slab had to be repoured because the Soviets had not had time to inspect it the night before.

Warnecke said the Soviets traveled to all the factories where material was being made for their embassy to learn about how it was made and approve it before it was installed.